

## PART 5: SOURCES OF FUNDS

Employees may use the centrally-billed GVTs account, their government-issued travel charge card, cash advances drawn against their travel charge card, and/or travel advances received from NFC to pay for travel expenses. Information on the use of the different payment methods follows.

### 1. GVTs

The GVTs is a centrally-billed charge account used by TMCs to directly bill the Agency for commercial transportation tickets. Costs are billed directly to the Agency.

#### A. Authorized Methods of Payment for Commercial Transportation Expense

In general, employees **must** use their government-issued travel charge card to pay for commercial transportation (airplane, train, and bus). Employees without travel charge cards, and all WDC-based FAS and FSA employees, obtaining tickets for foreign travel, must use the centrally-billed GVTs account. Using other forms of payment for commercial transportation are **not** permitted and may not be reimbursed.

When GVTs is used for new hires, casual (non-permanent) employees, non-government personnel, employees from other government agencies, and other personnel who are traveling for FSA, the Vendor Tables in FFIS need to be updated prior to submission of the first travel authorization and voucher. An Email containing the information on the traveler contained in Part 1, Paragraph 1K should be sent to Marsha Stevens [mlstevens@kcc.usda.gov](mailto:mlstevens@kcc.usda.gov)).

**NOTE:** Vendor tables should not have to be updated if new hires and casual (non-permanent) employees have already been added to the personnel files.

#### B. Procuring Commercial Transportation using GVTs (FSA only)

FSA will procure transportation through a GVTs account for newly employed FSA employees who have not received their government-provided travel charge cards or for FSA employees who have had their travel charge cards canceled due to misuse or non-payment of bills. The GVTs account at the National Office Travel Management Center (Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CWT)) is the **only** means by which GVTs transportation can be procured, and the following procedures must be followed:

- Before procurement can begin, a travel authorization for the travel and a memorandum requesting the use of the WDC GVTs account must be prepared, signed by the traveler's approving official, and faxed to FMD at 703-305-1147.

#### NOTES GVTs:

- For National Office employees, the approving official must be at the DD level or higher.
- If the traveler's ODS is a State or county office, the travel authorization and memorandum must be sent to DAFO for approval. DAFO will forward the documents to FMD.
- State office funds should be used for transportation for GS employees and county office funds should be used for transportation for CO employees. If additional funding is needed, the State office shall contact the Budget Division through DAFO.

**NOTES GVTS, *continued*:**

- The traveler must contact CWT at 877-832-6579 and make transportation reservations. CWT's hours of operation are Monday through Friday from 7:30 am to 5:30 p.m. EST. When calling, traveler's must identify themselves as traveling for FSA, which Deputy Administrator's office and division that they are traveling with, and provide both the travel authorization number and accounting classification code shown on their approved travel authorization. State and county office employees must identify themselves as DAFO employees.
- Employees can call CWT after hours at 1-800-383-6723 **only** when emergency situations, such as being stranded in an airport or other similar types of emergency exist. The after hours phone number should **not** be used to make regular or routine non-emergency reservations that could be made during normal working hours.
- After receipt of the signed travel authorization and memorandum, FMD will approve the release of the transportation tickets from CWT to the traveler. CWT will issue and provide the traveler either a ticket to board transportation when using a train, bus, or boat or an e-ticket itinerary/receipt to check in at the airport when using aircraft as the mode of transportation. Air transportation tickets must be procured from CWT in WDC and travelers will be issued **e-tickets only**.
- The cost of the air transportation ticket and the TMC transaction fee will be paid through the FSA GVTS account. The traveler will at no time, and in no way, be billed for the transportation.

**2. Government Travel Charge Cards****A. Policy on Use of Travel Charge Card**

The policy of GSA is that Federal employees are required to use the government travel charge card for all official travel expenses unless they have an exemption. The following circumstances constitute GSA, USDA, and FSA exemptions to GSA policy:

GSA exemptions:

- employees that have an application pending for the travel card
- individuals traveling on invitational travel
- new appointees

USDA exemptions:

- new employees who may be required to perform TDY travel en route to their first post of duty
- employees who have had their travel cards canceled for cause by the issuing bank
- intermittent or seasonal employees
- employees not expected to travel more than 4 times a year
- employees with credit issues

## A. Policy on Use of Travel Charge Card, *continued*

FSA exemptions:

- the Administrator, FSA, or designee, may grant exemptions from the mandatory use of the travel charge card
- the Administrator, FSA has issued no additional exemptions

Exemption from the required use of the travel charge card does not prevent an employee, on a voluntary basis, from using the travel charge card for official travel expenses.

## B. When to Use the Government Travel Charge Card?

USDA policy is that employees **must** use their government-issued travel charge cards for all official expenses except for out-of-pocket expenses, which include:

- laundry or dry cleaning
- parking
- local transportation systems
- taxicabs
- tips
- expenses covered by the M&IE allowance (when the use of the travel charge card is impractical, such as group meals or where the travel charge card is not accepted)
- telephone calls (when the government calling card is available for use according to Agency policy)
- expenses incurred at a vendor that does not accept the travel charge card

With the exception of common carrier transportation, if a traveler has been granted an exception from using the travel charge card, they may pay for official travel expenses with any combination of personal funds (cash or personal charge card) or travel advance. Travel advances are not available for employees who have had their travel cards canceled for cause by the issuing bank and they must use personal sources of funds.

## C. Misuse of the Travel Charge Card

The travel charge card may only be used for official travel expenses incurred while in travel status away from the ODS. Personal items that are **not** reimbursable as official expenses may **not** be purchased using the government travel charge card simply because they are bought while an employee is in a travel status. The travel charge card is not transferable and must only be used by the employee to whom it is issued. If the card is used for any purpose or expenses other than official travel, disciplinary action may be taken.

Employees who have lost their charge card privileges because of delinquency or use of the card for non-official purposes and need to perform official travel will charge their common carrier transportation to their agency centrally billed accounts. All other travel related costs must be paid by the employee using a personal charge card or with personal funds.

#### **D. Employee Liability**

The **employee** is liable for all charges to his or her government travel charge card account and it is the **cardholder's** responsibility to pay the account, in full, by the due date of the statement of account. The employee must notify their Agency Program Coordinator (APC) or Responsible Official (RO) and the card issuer (currently Bank of America) when there is a change in address and/or phone numbers for either work or home.

Employees are responsible for contacting their APC or RO when transferring from:

- one agency to another within the Department
- headquarters to State office
- State office to headquarters
- one Deputy Administrator to another (Office of the Administrator, Deputy Administrator for Commodity Operations, Deputy Administrator for Management, Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs, Deputy Administrator for Farm Loan Programs, and DAFO)

#### **E. Who should Obtain an Activated Government Travel Charge Card?**

Cardholders that traveled 4 or more times a year. Members of emergency response teams or of similar positions, managers, and all supervisors should remain activated regardless of the 4-times-a-year criteria. All cardholders who travel 4 or less times a year will have their cards reactivated at time of travel and deactivated when travel status is completed.

**F. How to Obtain a Government Travel Charge Card (FSA only)?**

The employee must submit application forms to the authorizing official and applicable APC for approval. This includes the signed statement of cardholder responsibilities and liabilities. Note: The overall APC is FMD.

<b>Employing Office</b>	<b>Authorizing official</b>	<b>Agency Coordinator</b>
County Offices and Ag Credit Teams	State Executive Director	Administrative Officer
State Offices	State Executive Director	Administrative Officer
APFO	Director, APFO	Office of the Director, APFO
KCFO/KCCO and St. Louis FSA Office	Division Director	KCFO/DDM/ASD
National Office	Division Director Bank of America Agency Program Coordinator	FMD Travel Unit, (ATPS) Washington, D.C. (WDC)
FAS	Bank of America Agency Program Coordinator	FMD/IAB

**NOTE:** The Bank of America Application for the government travel charge card can be obtained on the Bank of America website by following the instructions noted below. After completion, the application can be faxed to 703-305-1147 and the original mailed to FMD Travel Unit, ATPS, Stop 0581. The APC must approve the application. Bank of America will not accept an application without FSA approval. Once received, cardholders must activate their new cards by calling 1-800-311-7810.

The Bank of America's website for retrieving the government travel charge card application is: <http://www.gcsuthdbankofamerica.com>. After getting on the website, do the following:

- Click on "Forms" located at far right-hand side of the screen
- Scroll down to "Account Setup Forms"
- Click on "Arrow"
- Highlight "Individually Billed Account (IBA) Setup/Application Form for Non-DOD"
- Scroll down to "Application"
- Click on the "IBA Card Setup/Application-S01N1198.pdf or IBA Card Setup/Application-S01N1198.doc"

### **G. How to Obtain a Government Travel Charge Card (FAS only)?**

Forms can be obtained from Peter Hogan (703-305-1236) of the International Fiscal Operations Section, IAB, located at Park Office Center, 11th floor. After completing the application, the RO must approve the application. Bank of America will not accept an application without a FAS approval. Allow 30 days for processing the application and receipt of the card.

### **H. What is the Credit Limit for Government Travel Charge Card?**

FSA and FAS has established a credit limit of \$8,000 (\$4,000 per monthly cycle). Individuals with a high volume of foreign travel, who may need a higher limit, or Foreign Service Officers with a longer reimbursement cycle, will be given a credit limit of \$15,000 (\$7500 per monthly cycle). Please see the following for increasing the default credit limit:

- Authorization for an increase is made on a case-by-case basis. Employees should submit an approved written justification to their APC for FSA and RO for FAS, 3 to 7 days before the travel dates.
- An increase should not be required for relocation since the employee is expected to file travel vouchers in a timely manner for reimbursement. The cardholder will be authorized to receive a travel advance for relocation to cover expenses that can not be charged to the government travel charge card. However, if an employee lost their charge card privileges because of delinquency or use for non-official business, they will not be authorized a travel advance.
- Submit all requests to increase credit limits, signed by the approving official, to FMD's ATPS.

**NOTE:** Please refer to Notice FI-2596 - Part 2, Section A, Steps 3 and 4 for the increasing credit limit instructions.

### **I. How to Reactivate a Government Travel Charge Card?**

**APCs and ROs shall take the following action:**

- Reactivate a government travel charge card if the cardholder submits an application 3 to 7 days before the travel dates. The reactivation process may take up to 3 days through the Bank of America EAGLS system. APCs or ROs may call Bank of America's customer service and reactivate a card within 24 hours for travel assignments given without ample notice.

**NOTE:** Please refer to Notice FI-2596 - Part 2, Section A, Steps 1 and 2 for the reactivation instructions.

### **J. Lost/Stolen Card Reporting**

Cardholders must promptly report lost or stolen cards immediately. Bank of America Government Card Service Unit (GCSU) representatives are available 24 hours a day/7 days a week, including holidays. Cardholders within the U.S. should call 1-800-472-1424; cardholders outside the U.S. should call Bank of America collect at 1-757-441-4124. Cards reported lost or stolen are immediately "blocked" from accepting additional charges and a replacement card with a new account number will be sent to the cardholder.

## K. Disputes and Billing Errors

For all merchant issues, the cardholder should make every attempt to resolve the problem directly with the merchant. If the issue cannot be reasonably resolved with the merchant or the problem is an unresolved transaction or “billing error,” the cardholder must submit a dispute form, in writing, to Bank of America before 60 days from the date that the erroneous charge first appeared on the cardholder’s billing statement. Cardholders that require assistance should call the Bank of America GCSU at the phone numbers listed in Paragraph G above.

## L. Current Government Travel Charge Card Contractor Notification Procedures

Bank of America provides APCs and ROs with Pre-Suspension/Pre-Cancellation Reports to identify undisputed amounts that are past due on a cardholder’s IBA.

Accounts will be considered *delinquent* if payment has not been received within 45 calendar days from the billing date.

*Suspension* occurs when account balances are over 60 days past due from the billing date. When an account is suspended, the employee will be prohibited from making further charges.

Accounts, which have balances that are over 126 calendar days past due from the billing date, will be *cancelled*. These accounts will be closed and the account holder may be reported to the credit bureau. Once a card is cancelled, an employee will not be permitted to receive another card under any circumstances other than bank error.

An account that has balances over 210 days past due from the billing date will be considered *charged off* and may be referred to an attorney or collection agency.

## M. USDA Zero Tolerance Policy

Zero tolerance strictly prohibits the following uses of the card:

- a Unauthorized charges and charges not associated with official travel.
  - (1) Personal and family member use of the card is forbidden.
- b Charges while not in an official travel status.
  - (1) Use of the card in the vicinity of the official duty station or residence is forbidden unless used in connection with officially ordered travel.
  - (2) Cash withdrawals from an automated teller machine are also forbidden.
- c Shared use of the card with another employee for official travel purposes.
- d Account delinquency beyond a 30-day period.
- e Failure to use the card while on travel.
- f Failure to pay accounts with sufficient funds.
- g Failure to use Government voucher reimbursements to repay travel expenses.
- h Excessive cash advances, or cash advances not commensurate with official travel.

Please refer to Notice FI-2591, Interim Guidance on USDA's Travel Charge Card Program for the following policies and procedures not listed in this FSA/FAS Travel Policy and Procedure Manual:

### **PART 3**

- DEFINITIONS

### **PART 5**

- RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE:
  - Office of the Chief Financial Officer,
  - Office of Human Resources Management,
  - Agency Heads,
  - Cardholder's Immediate Supervisor,
  - Agency/Organization Program Coordinators, and
  - Employees.

### **PART 6**

- PROCEDURES:
  - Travel Card Issuance,
  - Use of the Travel Card,
  - Exemptions to the Use of the Travel Charge Card,
  - Travel Voucher Reimbursement,
  - Cumulative Use of the Travel Card Reports, and
  - Collection of Delinquent Amounts.

## **3. Cash Payments**

### **A. Definition**

In this paragraph, the term "cash" includes:

- personal checks
- travelers checks
- personal credit cards
- cash withdrawals obtained from an ATM using a government-issued travel charge card

### **B. When Cash Should be Used?**

Cash should be used:

- when the expense is \$100 or less,
- for excess baggage charges costing \$15 or less for each leg of the trip (**Note:** these expenses must be authorized on the travel authorization.),
- for meals and incidental expenses,
- for miscellaneous transportation expenses such as local transportation system and taxi fares, parking fees, ferry fees, bridge, road, and tunnel fees; and aircraft parking, landing and tie-down fees, and
- for gasoline and other variable expenses.

**Note:** A recent change in Departmental policy permits use of the government-issued travel charge card to purchase gasoline for a POV when used for official travel. Travelers, however, should limit their purchase with the card to the amount of gasoline that they will need for official travel.



## **B. When Cash Should be Used?, *continued***

Gasoline purchases are reimbursed as part of the mileage rate allowance, and are **never** allowed as a **miscellaneous expense** claim on a travel voucher.

## **4. Travel Advances**

### **A. Request for Travel Advance**

To alleviate the use of personal funds on official travel, employees without travel charge cards may be issued travel advances for certain expenses. Travel advances are not available for employees who have had their travel cards canceled for cause and they must use personal sources of funds.

### **B. Ways of Obtaining a Travel Advance**

The **primary** method for obtaining cash advances for FSA and FAS employees who have been issued the government travel charge card is through the ATM program. FSA and FAS employees who have not been issued the government travel charge card can obtain an advance of funds for official travel from NFC by requesting it on the AD-202 or the advance can be requested, separately, on its own AD-202 (refer to the NFC Procedures Manual for instructions for obtaining travel advances).

### **C. Authorized ATM Cash Advances**

ATM cash advances should be made only after an employee is officially authorized to travel and as close as possible to the actual beginning date of travel. All cash advances are to be used for cash transaction expenses (refer to Paragraph 5B) incurred while on official travel and may never be used to procure common carrier transportation such as air, rail or bus. The advance amounts should be within the guidelines set forth in the table found in Paragraph 4E and are limited by the Department. Cash needs should not exceed \$50 per day. Travelers will be reimburse for service fees for ATM advances not exceeding \$50 per day multiplied by the number of calendar days in domestic travel status, for a maximum of seven calendar days or \$375 per week. USDA's weekly limit for international travel is \$1021.

ATM surcharges and service fees are reimbursable as a "miscellaneous expense" item on the travel voucher.

The government issued travel charge card should not be used to obtain cash for any purpose other than official travel expenses and misuse may result in disciplinary action.

### **D. Authorizing Official**

For GS employees, the approving official authorized to approve the travel authorization approves a travel advance request on the AD-202. The employee must sign and date the travel advance section of the AD-202. The CED authorizes the travel advance for CO employees on the AD-202 and sends it to the State office for approval.

Both employees and approving officials are responsible for ensuring that advances are not requested until needed and that the amount requested is commensurate with the travel to be performed.

### E. Amount of Advance

Approving officials should ensure the travel advance amount is within the guidelines set forth in the table below:

Type of travel	If traveler is eligible for Government-issued travel charge card	If traveler is not eligible for Government-issued travel charge card
Temporary duty travel, domestic or international	Amount not to exceed the M&IE allowance, mileage reimbursement, local transportation costs and miscellaneous expenses stated on travel authorization	80 percent of the estimated per diem and miscellaneous expense amount stated on the travel authorization
Official change of station	80% of estimated expenses employee is expected to incur, and which would not be payable by the charge card. This may not exceed \$5,000.	80 percent of estimated expenses employee is expected to incur, not to exceed \$5,000

### F. Exceptions

Exceptions to granting more than the stated limits of advances is limited to situations where commercial establishments, either domestically or internationally, do not accept the government-issued travel charge card or when eligible employees do not have a government-issued travel charge card. In these cases, the travelers should prepare a memorandum justifying the need for the additional amount and attach it to the advance request.

### G. Repayment of Travel Advances

Employees who receive a travel advance through the ATM program are liable for the cash received. The ATM cash advance and associated fees (surcharge/handling fee) are billed to the traveler on the cardholder statement each month and the amounts are due and payable. Associated fees, which are also annotated on the ATM receipt at the time of the cash transaction, are reimbursable as “miscellaneous” expense items on the travel voucher.

Employees who receive a travel advance must account for the travel advance by submitting a travel voucher. Approving officials are responsible for ensuring that travel advances no longer needed for official travel are liquidated. Generally, an advance is considered excessive if it exceeds the amount commensurate with the travel to be performed.

### G. Repayment of Travel Advances, *continued*

Travel vouchers should be submitted within **5** working days after completion of the trip or period of travel, or at least every 30 days if the employee is in a continuous travel status. On the voucher, the employee must show the total amount of the advance issued by NFC or received through the County Office Expense system that is outstanding at the time of voucher preparation and enter the amount of the travel reimbursement that is to be applied to the outstanding advance balance. Any advance balance not completely liquidated by the travel voucher should be repaid by direct remittance (refer to the NFC Procedures Manual for instructions).

## 5. Payment of Travel Expenses By Outside Sources

### A. General Rule (FSA Only)

Generally, government employees are prohibited from accepting payment of travel expenses from non-Federal sources. This prohibition applies to all travel, whether in connection with official duty or otherwise. Employees should not accept any payments directly from non-Federal sources. **Employees should consult the Agency ethics officer before accepting payment of any expenses from non-Federal sources.**

FSA employees should refer to Part 10, Paragraph 10, for policies and procedures relating to this subject.

## 6. GTRs

The use of GTRs was discontinued on June 1, 2003. The procedure for returning unused and accounting for used GTRs is contained in Notice FI-2588.